

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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## PARTS OF OIL REFINERY, AIRPORT, AND RIFLE RANGE PROPOSED AS CRITICAL LIVING SPACE FOR BUTTERFLIES AND PLANTS

Parts of an oil refinery, a U.S. Army rifle range, and Los Angeles International Airport are among almost 100 square miles of California land proposed as habitat critical to the survival of six endangered species of butterflies and two endangered plant candidates by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director, announced today.

But that does not mean the airport must shut down or change its operations, or that the refinery must close or that the Army cannot continue using the rifle range, he emphasized.

Areas finally determined to be critical habitat require that all Federal departments and agencies ensure that actions authorized, funded, or carried out by them do not result in the destruction or adverse modification of those habitats.

The proposed rulemaking, published in the February 8, 1977, Federal Register, excludes existing manmade structures or settlements and is not expected to severely impact existing activities. Interested persons have until April 8, 1977, to comment on the proposal.

Most of the areas proposed as critical habitat are strung along the scenic California coastline and include isolated sand dune, bog, and mountain ecosystems--each unique and fragile. But California's human population is also concentrated along this same coastline, and land changes to accommodate people caused the plight of the butterflies and plants. The Fish and Wildlife Service believes that protection of the critical habitat is the key to their conservation and possible recovery.

"We do have proof that some endangered species can continue to coexist side by side with human activities, even though at first glance this odd array of land areas would not appear to be important to endangered wildlife and plants," Schreiner said.

"These fragile little pieces of habitat, some of which are only two acres, have as yet only been slightly affected by the developments which surround them. They can support the butterflies because the insects require very little habitat to survive. Each of the six butterflies is about an inch in wingspan, and butterflies of this size rarely travel more than an acre away from the plants they feed on in the caterpillar stage. So, protecting the areas where these plants exist is critical to the species' survival."

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Critical habitat zones are also proposed from two plants determined to be amongst the most endangered in the State by the California Native Plant Society. Both plants occur in the same ecosystem as the Lange's metalmark butterfly and face the same environmental threats.

The species and the parts of their habitats now being proposed for protection are:

The El Segundo Blue Butterfly--Because of public and private development the species is limited to two acres located within the Standard Oil Refinery in El Segundo and a larger area at the west end of Los Angeles International Airport. The oil company has already erected a chain-link fence to protect the habitat it owns.

The Lange's Metalmark Butterfly--Industrial and agricultural development have confined the species to a few acres of sand dunes near Antioch. Proposed critical habitat for this species is coincidentally the only known range of two plant species which have been proposed for the endangered list.

The Smith's Blue Butterfly--This butterfly lives on coastal and sand dunes in Monterey County, with the largest population occurring on the coastal side on the Monterey dune complex at Seaside. Highway construction and housing developments have almost extirpated the species there. Another population is located on the U.S. Army installation at Fort Ord where the introduction of ice plants has changed the habitat. The Army is in the process of establishing several preserves to protect remaining natural areas.

The Mission Blue Butterfly--Because this butterfly is critically dependent upon a particular species of plant which now only grows on the summits of Twin Peaks, San Francisco, and San Bruno Mountains in San Mateo County, remaining populations of the species are confined to those areas. The San Francisco County population exists amid the city's radio and TV towers on a narrow strip of relatively undeveloped private land that is sandwiched between two fashionable residential areas.

The San Bruno Elfin Butterfly--Range is now restricted to a few moist canyons and other portions of San Mateo County. The butterfly is dependent upon the present lay of the land and the floral elements in the valleys. Most of the land is under private ownership although some is owned by the county and Federal Government.

The Lotis Blue Butterfly--The principal portion of the butterfly's habitat occurs on a powerline right-of-way near the edge of an isolated bog in Mendocino County.

The Antioch Dunes Evening Primrose and Contra Costa Wallflower share the same ecosystem as Lange's metalmark butterfly and face the same threats. None of the endangered butterflies feed on these plants.

Interested persons may submit written comments, preferably in triplicate, to Director (FWS/WPO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.